3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13



in return. Even a slave used to have rights of appeal to the king if he were starved and beaten without cause. The king was the prime mover in warfare. The whole legal system is at this time directly under Portuguese administration though the kings and chiefs have minor powers. Ngonga says that complainants who are dissatisfied with the decision of their own chief go to the Fort, meaning of course the Portuguese military post, or office of the Administrador.

There is no doubt that in former days the responsibility for crime and debt was transferred to a relative in the absence of the delinquent. If a thief escaped, responsibility would rest with a brother, a father or a son. The mother's brother was often held to be responsible for the misdeeds and debts of his sister's children. The mother's brother has rights that extend to the sale of his sister's children to pay his debts. For this reason Ngonga says, "If I have done wrong and they cannot catch me it is right that he (mother's brother) should pay for me."

I supposed the case of Ngonga having stolen a cow; he has been caught but escapes. Ngonga said that the man from whom he had stolen the animal would go to his (Ngonga's) mother's brother in order to name the price required for the cow, or any other possession which had been stolen. If the mother's brother thought the price reasonable he would pay. On the contrary, if the price claimed were too high the mother's brother would appeal, first to the village chief, then if necessary to the king.

Ownership of land does not appear to have been a source of dispute. Apparently land was distributed by the chief as explained in dealing with village organization. Rights seem to have been well defined and there was always enough land for a stranger. When a man was going away on a trading journey he might lend his land to another who would agree to cultivate it and take the produce for a year. I was unable to satisfy myself that land is now, or was in time past held to be the property of dead ancestors. The right to land depends on its use and allotment by a chief at the time of founding a village. A man who intended to be absent would make a payment so that he might leave his goods at the house of another. The chief would settle any disputes arising from these arrangements.

The complainant in a suit is called *ombile*, the defendant is *ovilue*. The name for a witness is *uvangi*. In the old days a false witness had to make recompense to the man about whom he had told a lie; he would probably have a beating as well. A master was in every way responsible for the actions of a slave. The degree of responsi-

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
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[1874-1910]

## THE OLD SOCIETY

The trade was conducted in caravans composed of up to several thousand people,[48] under the leadership of *entrepeneurs* called *olofumbelo* (of which the singular is *ofumbelo*). Of such were the individuals whom Serpa Pinto describes as earning wealth equivalent to a thousand pounds or more. Their role was to get together the caravans, to negotiate with the local political authorities, and to provide ritual leadership. The exact relationship between the *ofumbelo* and the ordinary members of the caravan is difficult to see. European travellers found that porters were content with low wages since they had opportunities for private trade, but apparently the caravan organizers had better opportunities for getting rich than had ordinary Ovimbundu. My informants stated that a man organized a caravan to gain wealth. A man who was in a position of prosperity would be known as an *ohwase* (rich man), would stay at home and be expected to assist his relatives.[49]

Differemt ages and both sexes participated in the trade. Childs says that boys from the age of nine upwards travelled on the caravans, and this is confirmed by Serpa Pinto.[50] Tucker, amd my informants however, give the age when caravan travel began as being fifteen or over.[51] Unmarried girls travelled too, but simply acted as helpers to some male relative. The caravan organizers (*olofumbelo*) were old men, I was told, and travelled iin the rear while in front of the caravan marched a young main (called the *kesongo*) who carried a flag.[52]

Dr. Childs states that between 1874 and 1886 rubber was gathered ffrom the forests of the interior and took eight months (four momths each way presumably) for the Ovimbundu to obtain. From 1886, however, 'red rubber' was obtained from the sandy lands beyond the Cuanza, a journey which only took three months altogether. Hence, Childs states, the trading

[48] A Bastos, *Monografia de Catumbella*, in *Bol. Soc. Geog. Lisboa* 1910 (p. 131) states that caravans of several thousand were used in the 1870s but that by the time of writing (1908–9, nearly the end of the trade) people came in small parties. My informants who would remember this period spoke of the large size of the caravans.

[49] My informants.

[50] Serpa Pinto, p. 164.

[51] J. T. Tucker in *Africa* (Notes and News), April 1956.

[52] Informants.

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631/564 funerals (though these burials could be undertaken by the cross-cousins of the deceased). When *sakwatjiseko* came to their partner-chiefdom for a funeral they had the right to steal small live-stock, such as chickens, or pigeons, but not cattle, goats, or pigs. An *akwatjiseko* could sleep with the wives of his *sakwatjiseko* partners without being sued for damages.[68] [837]

631/[602] The ties of kinship and affinity crossed the boundaries of the sub-chiefdoms and even of the kingdoms.[69] The members [463] of the three spirit-protected professions, blacksmithing, divining, and hunting recognized obligations of hospitality to co-[574] professionals from other parts of the country.[70] Again the caravans were so large that they must have involved people [437] from many sub-chiefdoms, which presupposes a wide range of contacts.

182 It may be said that the picture given here is contradictory and inadequate. How can the existence of large kingdoms be reconciled to the extreme insecurity described by old men? How do the wealthy caravan organizers fit into the political system? What sort of politics were there in the kingdoms? It is not easy to answer these questions owing to the lack of evidence, and, probably, because the kingdoms were already in decline during the latter part of the rubber trade period. Indeed, the impression that accounts of the Ovimbundu in the nineteenth century give is that of adventure, battle, commerce, migration —a vigorous rather than a stable society.[71]

61/114 The kinship system is perhaps the field of Umbundu society which has aroused most interest among anthropologists. Childs and Hastings have written much that is interesting on the old double-descent grouping but as, with the kinship system, the form has been described rather than the functioning and it is

[68] Informants. The account in Childs, pp. 114–15 differs considerably. For this institution elsewhere in Angola see Estermann, 'Clans et alliances de clans', *Anthropos*, 1932.

[69] Childs, p. 54.

[70] Informants.

[71] Magyar describes the king and his courtiers as being extremely despotic towards the villagers, and states that their despotism depended on their having a standing military force called 'Sons of the Elephant' (pp. 278–80). Later accounts do not mention this, and Childs notes (p. 209) that at the height of the rubber trade it was more difficult for the kings to recruit armies for their wars.

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could be resolved in the matrilineal group.[78] Hastings, who gives the most detailed account of the matrilineal groups, which he calls sibs, tells us, 'There can be no exaction of fines or taking of slaves between the members of a sib group—the group members are supposed to pay each other's debts, and one who has wealth and refuses so to communicate may be secretly poisoned by the others. It is within the group of matrilineal sibs that most compacts, whether social or economic, are formed and operate. The same is true even of malevolent plots and anti-social practices, such as killing by witchcraft.'[79]

Clearly, the matrilineal groups in which the rich had to pool their wealth with poorer kinsfolk and in which trading arrangements[80] were made indicate the adaptation of the kinship system to the needs of the trade. It may be suggested that one of the functions of the double descent system was to separate the fields of village and chiefdom relations, established through patrilineal ties, from the field of commerce, credit, and the inheritance of wealth gained by trade. Thus the conflicts in which a man would be involved in one set of relations would not involve his other set of ties, and this distribution of stresses must have limited the strains set up by disputes. The distinction between the local group and the commercial group would also prevent heavy losses from trade striking a whole village simultaneously.[81] The credit institutions demanded by a trading system in which debt was frequently incurred were fitted into the kinship system, and associated with a device for levelling those who had become prosperous in the trade.

Unhappily the disintegration of the traditional social structure, and the accompanying loss of knowledge of it, prevented me from adding to, or even corroborating entirely, the written material on the form of the matrilineal groups.[82] It is not at all evident how the groups maintained integration, or how new

[78] Hambly, p. 200.

[79] Ibid., p. 92.

[80] Dr. Childs suggested to me that the core of the caravans might be composed of kin. However, the caravans were so large that they clearly could not be organized on a kinship basis. See also Serpa Pinto, p. 165.

[81] This point was suggested to me by Dr. Mary Douglas.

[82] I did not obtain any information on the size of the matrilineal group, the existence of heads of the groups, and the degree to which it was a congregation.

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[1874-1911]



groups emerged. The information on the cult of the matrilineal spirits which might have thrown some light on matrilineal conflicts and integration, is confused. Both Hastings and Mrs. Tucker state that the matrilineal spirits are always malevolent, but this is not confirmed by my informants,[83] and it may be that they were referring to the traditional belief that sorcery was only practised between members of a matrilineal group. Although, as has been stated, a man looked to his matrilineal kin for economic aid, he might travel with his father (who had first claim on his services), or with his mother's brother or some other kinsman; indeed while his father was still alive he might travel and trade on his own account.[84] The matrilineal group (in this area at least) was not a unit from which trading teams were formed, but rather a means for providing financial assistance when needed for those engaged in trading. It is of course possible that in some areas of Umbundu country the matrilineal kin groups were significant in the organization of trading caravans.

Another institution whose form can be described but whose function cannot be properly known is that of preferential marriage with certain categories of kin. Childs states that the categories were cross-cousins (both patrilateral and matrilateral), the sister's daughter, and the father's sister, and indicates that the cross-cousin marriages were not generally with first-cousins. My informants generally denied that it had been permitted to marry a father's sister, but confirmed his other statements. They added that an indemnification was paid by the bridegroom to the bride's family 'to cut the blood',[85] and that the kinship terms were replaced by affinal. This suggests that these marriages may have been intended to restore distant kinship ties by turning them into affinal ties and so renewing them for the next generation, but how this would operate cannot even be guessed.

[83] Hastings, p. 87; L. S. Tucker, 'The Divining Basket of the Ovimbundu', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1940, pp. 171–201.

[84] Informants.

[85] This was paid down to 1949 or so in the area where I was. It was about 20 escudos, much less than bridewealth. It was formerly referred to by the Umbundu term for 'fine' (*ocindo*), as was the payment made on the death of a non-kinswoman wife.

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that the Government is benevolent even if its agents are not, and men say that they like the Europeans. There are other opposed currents of feeling, though; thus a cook to a European family said to me, 'The Portuguese do not wish us to learn' and a villager declared, 'The Portuguese say to the English that the Ovimbundu have tails.'[39] The great mass of the Ovimbundu seemed to be without political consciousness, or desire for independence; there is little nostalgia for the days of the caravans, and it is widely felt that the present is better than the past, since there is more contact with Europeans.

Traders in the neighbourhood were relatively few, compared to other parts of Umbundu country. At Chicunda there were three trading stores and people who did not like them went across the river to Cassongue. Traders try to prevent natives who live in their neighbourhood from dealing at other stores where they can get better prices, but this is not always effective. Some Ovimbundu realize that variations of price levels are related to such factors as proximity to the railway line. The traders are criticized for paying their servants low wages as compared with those paid in the coastal cities. Although there is a great deal of mutual suspicion between the traders and the Ovimbundu which is expressed in the arguing and haggling that takes place in the stores, there is none of the fear so noticeable in the people's attitudes to the *chefes*. Many traders have a smattering of Umbundu, and have a certain affection for the local people. Economically, the role of the traders is to receive the maize and other products grown locally for transport to the railway line, and to distribute trade goods to the villages. Their presence is also important in preventing the rise of any other system of trading by markets or pedlars.

The principal goods sold are blankets, cloths, and clothing of all sorts, including fancy items such as sun-glasses. There are also a good many bottles of wine, and also oil-lamps and kerosene tins, and electric torches. For literates or would-be literates, there are pens, pencils, writing-papers and slates. Such goods as bicycles, gramophones, and sewing-machines are generally

[39] I.e. The Portuguese say the Ovimbundu are savages and keep them from contact with other Europeans. The Ballundo area had not (up to September 1961) been affected by the revolt. However, a marked change in this attitude of submissiveness seems to have taken place.

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Luveli's income from bricklaying. The laying of the bricks that form a modern villager's house may bring 100 escudos.

The basic cash need of an Otjimbundu, then, is for money to pay government demands and to provide clothing for his wife and children, who seem more likely than the men to get new clothing every year.[8] Add to this the possibility of other calls (e.g. provision for a relative's funeral) a desirable income even for this low level of consumption would be 400 escudos (£5) and a more prosperous villager might earn and spend double the amount. Exceptional individuals still remaining within the normal conditions of Umbundu cultural and social life, such as Kambungo, may earn from 2,000 to 3,000 escudos a year, perhaps even more, from agriculture. Maize is the foundation of the agricultural economy, but Kambungo's remark that maize did not pay seems to reflect a trend to find other openings such as growing coffee, which is, however, subject to difficulties of climate.

Within the villages there is some trade in handmade objects such as pottery, sleeping-mats, and sticks for stirring mush, and there are quite a number of bricklayers, carpenters, and tailors (proprietors of sewing-machines) who have acquired European skills which bring them money. These craftsmen are, on payment of a fee of 250 escudos (a figure given me by a tailor), exempt from contract labour.

Many European residents seem to think that the only European products natives desire are cloths, clothing, and wine. This is not so; villagers wanted me to sell them kerosene for lamps, D.D.T. powder for their hair, and soap. It is interesting that the occasions on which an Otjimbundu would accumulate large (for him) sums all fall outside the maize-for-cloth pattern of trading. These occasions are bridewealth payment (and counting all expenses this may well come to 800 escudos—£10 or more), which is a traditional due, the purchase of bicycles (according to p[illegible] of purchase from 1,200 escudos [£15] to 1,500 escudos [£18. 15. 0]) which are prestige-giving objects, and the trading journeys to buy cattle. Kambungo had

[8] The trader whose opinions I have previously quoted (Senhor Alberto Oliveira Mendes of Chicunda), remarked, 'It is the women who save us. The men make a shirt last for three or four years but the women get something new every year.'

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gramophone in a town rather than at a trader's near his home village. Most of the money paid for purchases at the stores is money raised by selling crops or livestock. Through labour migration there is, however, some transmission of skills; it is easy to find bricklayers and carpenters of a sort even in Gumba.

Money, rather than barter, is the principal means of exchange among the villages in the selling of local products, and even of meat from pigs. Payment for labour service, such as assistance in house-building and in bringing in maize, is made in beer, except among Protestants who substitute a meal. There is also a custom by which a household which finds, probably at the end of the dry season, that it has not enough maize will make beer to exchange on a particular day for maize.

Ties of kinship and friendship have some economic significance. A kinsman will help with house-building without expecting payment; likewise a man who has a cleared field which he does not want to use may sell it for 200 escudos (£2. 10s.) but would give it free to a kinsman. A man may make a charge for lending his bicycle, though this varies with individuals; he certainly would not do so if it were lent to a friend. Loans between kinsmen should be repaid, and a tailor with a sewing-machine will make the same charges to relatives as to non-kinsmen.

There are few occasions for groups to work together. The unit of consumption and production is the domestic family. Even here, the husband, each wife, and the adolescents have their own fields, though a man may help his wife. Such other occasions of mutual help, in clearing a field, which may occur between friends or kinsmen, will only bring a few, often only two of them.

The Ovimbundu I knew were (with exceptions) not avaricious or grasping; thus, beer might be given to people who have not actually worked in house-building parties. It is regarded as a moral duty to pay one's monetary debts as soon as possible. On various occasions I lent money to people who were pressed and I received back all the money lent. Borrowers insisted that borrowings should be written down, and that the paper on which it was written should be given to them when they paid, or destroyed. Making money and being rich are regarded with

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593 604 in the hands of the mother's brother, though the father could, if he wished, intervene; and a man could establish a shrine of his own while his father lived.

613 It is not altogether easy to see how the matrilineal group maintained its cohesion. It was not the working team on which the caravan trade operated since a man's father had first claim on his services, and he could travel with other relatives. Within it alone loans need not be repaid and accusations of sorcery were made; with this in mind, it is evident why, as Dr. Hastings tells us, people tended to avoid the company of their matrikin, [578] and why most disputes arose in the matrilineal groups.[22] It 613 seems that probably the key to the functioning of the matri- 437 lineal groups lies in the details, not now recoverable, of the economy of the caravan trade. As everybody, however successful, was in danger at some time or another of incurring heavy losses,[23] an arrangement by which anybody who was in difficulties could call on his kin for help would be generally acceptable. The association of mutual aid of this sort with matrilineal rather than patrilineal kin would spread losses geographically and would exclude conflicts over currency and movable property from village life. Moreover, the dispersal of the matrilineal kin would provide an individual with business contacts over a considerable area.

5. *Contemporary Kinship Norms*

593 Much of this has disappeared. The men's house is no longer 264 the dining-room of the village male population. Men now often 178 eat with their wives and children though attitudes and practice of this vary between households. People in their twenties knew of the existence of these avoidance rules but it seems that the rules forbidding sons to eat with their mother and eldest sons and daughters to eat with their father are now generally ignored.

[692] [22] Hastings, pp. 18, 87. Disputes within the matrilineal group could be, and very often were, referred to the sub-chief and king. The account of legal proceedings in Hastings (pp. 139–51) suggests that a high proportion of the cases heard by the kings were to do with sorcery. In such cases the social extension of the matrilineal group beyond the area of the sub-chiefdom and the wider political integration achieved by the kingdoms 'co-operated' in preserving a range of social relations beyond the sub-chiefdom.

[23] Apropos of losses Childs quotes Magyar as saying that the Ovimbundu traded for excitement rather than gain (p. 204).